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JOHN RANDOLPH

Born June 2nd, 1773

Died May 24th, 1833

Remains removed from Roanoke to Richmond
December 13th, 1879

From the Deposition of Dr. Joseph Parrish in
JOHN RANDOLPH'S CASE

Deposition Relative to
JOHN RANDOLPH
of Roanoke

Joseph Parrish of the city of Philadelphia. Doctor of Medicine. Aged 55 yrs. or thereabouts—being produced, affirmed and examined on behalf of Wm. Meade, named in the annexed commission— Deposeth as follows—

“That being legally required to make a deposition relative to John Randolph of Roanoke, I do hereby state my recollection of such incidents as I consider calculated to show the state of his mind, during the period of my medical attendance. John Randolph died under my medical care, on the morning of Fifth month (May) 24th, 1833, at one quarter before twelve o'clock. He breathed his last in a chamber of the City Hotel, No. 41 North 3d street. I was present at his departure; closed his eyes—and placed his limbs in a decent position. I was called to visit him on the 20th Inst., by Edmund Badger, one of the proprietors of the City Hotel.

It was a stormy night:—The patient had arrived that afternoon, in the steam boat from Baltimore:—he was bound for Europe, and had been disappointed in getting on board the Packet. He soon informed me that he was acquainted with me by character. “I know you through Giles”—alluding I presume to William B. Giles late governor of Virginia, respecting whose case I was repeatedly consulted.

The patient appeared much disturbed on account of some difficulties he had encountered, after leaving the steam

boat. It was evident he was extremely ill. His debility was such that it was with great difficulty he could expectorate, which caused much distress in respiration. He appeared fully aware of his danger:—told me he had attended several courses of lectures on anatomy—described his symptoms with medical accuracy, declaring he must die—if he could not discharge the puriform matter. On enquiring how long he had been sick—he replied “Dont ask me that question:—I have been sick all my life.” He soon told me however, that he had been affected with his present disease for three years—which had been greatly aggravated by his voyage to Russia “this had killed him.” On feeling his pulse he said—“You can form no judgment by my pulse, it is so peculiar.” I soon, perceived that to manage the case before me, would be like steering between Scylla and Carybdis, and concluded to proceed by cautious soundings, rather than advance, under full sail. . . . I told him, he had been so long, an invalid, he must have acquired an accurate knowledge of the general course of practice adapted to his case. He replied—“Certainly at forty a fool or Physician you know.” I remarked there were Idiosyncrasies, in many constitutions, and wished to ascertain what was peculiar about him. He said—“I have been an Idiosyncrasy all my life.” This appeared truly a most trite and correct view of the subject—altho’ the querist did not consider it necessary to give a concurring reply. He informed me, that all the preparations of Camphor invariably injured him, & as to Ether, “it would blow me up”: not so of opium and its preparations, for I soon discovered that he was accustomed to the free use of this drug—in some way or other. On one occasion, he told me, that he either did, or could (I am not clear as to the words—*did* or *could*) take Opium like a Turk; but I certainly received from him, the impression that he was in the habitual use of Opium, in some shape or other.

This conversation was curiously diversified and he complained with no small asperity of the difficulties he encountered after leaving the Steam Boat. He was put into a wretched Hack—the glass of the carriage was broken—he had been obliged to go from one Hotel to another in search of lodgings, exposed to the peltings of the storm, and everything was in a state of discomfort. He soon introduced the subject of the Quakers, complimenting us in his peculiar manner, for “Neatness—Economy—Order—comfort in everything—right in everything except Politics—there, always twistical.”

Before I retired, he repeated a portion of the Litany of the Episcopal Church, with apparent fervor.

The following morning he sent for me early. I was called from bed. He apologized handsomely for disturbing me and from this period we appeared mutually, to enter into our new acquaintance, in the capacity of Patient and Physician. After considerable experience in sick chambers, & at death beds, I may say I never met with a character so perfectly original and unique. He might be sometimes compared to a spoiled and fractious child, but a little observation convinced me, that in the midst of his extreme constitutional irritability—petulance—impatience—and sarcasm, there were some noble traits of character: among them was a keen sense of propriety, & when this was gently appealed to, there was a disposition to be convinced & acknowledge indiscretions. On more than one occasion it seemed proper for the Patient to understand, that while his Physician felt every disposition to treat him with kindness and respect, he was not insensible to what was due to himself. On one occasion when I prepared something for his relief, he petulantly and positively refused compliance,—I paused, and addressed a few words to him—his good sense predominated—he apologized and was as submissive as an infant. One evening I proposed a medical consultation, leaving the choice to himself,—with, an assurance of entire

confidence in his medical attendants, he promptly objected to the proposal, with the remark—"In a multitude of counsel there is confusion it leads to weakness and indecision: The Patient may die while the doctors are staring at each other." On parting with him, especially at night, I would receive the kindest acknowledgments, in the most affectionate tones—generally with the addition—"God bless you—he does bless you—and he will bless you."

It seemed as tho' his disposition to criticize, on the pronunciation of words could not be restrained under any circumstances of bodily suffering or immediate danger of Death:—the slightest deviation from his standard of propriety—must be met and corrected. In the application of words, to convey ideas, he was extremely exact. He once remarked to me, that altho' the French was a vile language, yet it was preferable to any other for Treaties and Public Documents, because every word was in its exact place—"No double meaning—there it stands." The night preceding his death I passed about two hours in his chamber. He told me in a plaintive tone, that his poor John was worn down by fatigue and compelled to go to bed. A most attentive substitute supplied his place but neither he nor I were like John, who knew where to place his hand on everything, in a large quantity of baggage prepared for an European voyage. The patient was greatly distressed in breathing, in consequence of difficult expectoration and requested me, at my next visit, to bring instruments for performing the operation of Bronchotomy, for he could not live unless relieved—yet in the same interview he directed a certain newspaper to be brought to him:—it was found after a difficult search;—he put on his spectacles, as he sat propped up in bed, turned over the paper several times and examined it carefully—then placed his finger on a part he had selected—& handed it to me, with a request that I should read it. It was headed "Cherokee". In the course of reading, I came to the word "Omnipotence"—I gave it the full

sound,—Omni-potence—he checked me instantly, repeating it according to Walker—I offered my reasons for pronouncing it as I did:—he did not rebut,—but quickly said—“Pass on.” Not long after, I pronounced the word—“Impetus” with the e long. He corrected me, instantly—I hesitated on his criticism, & in an inquiring and doubtful tone, repeated the word as he had pronounced it. He sharply replied “There can be no doubt of it” An immediate acknowledgment of the Reader, that he stood corrected, appeared to satisfy the Critic, and the piece was concluded. I now observed to him that there was a great deal of sublimity in the composition:—he directly referred me to the Mosaic account of the Creation—and repeated—“Let there be Light, and there was Light.” “There is sublimity”—

He spoke in the interview of the slanders and lies, that had been published against him in the newspapers.—even his domestic arrangements,—his silver cups &c had been noticed, when every one might know that silver was more economical than china or cut glass that was liable to be broken. I believe the Patient never fully relinquished his hold on life, until the day he died:—it is true, he had often said he was dying—he must die—, or words to this effect—but these were rather to be considered as the ebullitions of a morbidly irritable mind. The hope of getting off to Europe still lingered with him. In proof I will state, that perhaps on the third day of my attendance, he informed me that he intended to go to New York the next morning, and wished my bill to be left at the Bar. I understood it to be his intention, to embark at New York, for Europe. Instead of going in the morning as he expected, he was so extremely ill in the night, that I was called from my bed to visit him. He also requested me to have some Sulphate of Morphis, which he had in his possession as a pure, imported article—divided into papers of one grain each. This was done by my directions, at the Apothecary Store of Chas.

Ellis, No. 56 Chestnut St., who put up my prescriptions for the Patient.

The morning of the day that John Randolph died, I received an early and urgent message, to visit him:—several persons were in the room—but left it—except his servant John, who appeared affected at the situation of his dying master. I remarked to John, soon after I arrived, that I had seen his master very low several times before—and he had revived, and perhaps he would again. The Patient directly said—“John knows better than that.”

The interview of this morning was peculiarly impressive. I had not been long with him, before he looked at me with great intensity and said in a very earnest and distinct manner, “I confirm every disposition in my will—especially that respecting my slaves, whom I have manumitted, and for whom I have made provision.” This declaration was to me altogether unexpected:—it involved a subject which in our previous interviews, had never been touched. It was one I should not have introduced. I assured him I was rejoiced to hear such a declaration from him—he appeared anxious to impress it on my mind. Soon after this I proposed to go, for a short time, to attend an urgent message received just before I left home, assuring my Patient I would return as speedily as possible. He positively objected to my leaving him:—“You must not go,—you cannot,—you shall not leave me.” He called to his servant John to take care that the Doctor did not leave the room, & John accordingly locked the door and soon reported—“Master I have locked the door and got the key in my pocket;—the Doctor can’t go now.” My proposal to leave him for a short time, even on a promise of return, evidently irritated him for a moment. It may show the situation of his mind, when I state that in the moment of excitement to which I referred, he said—“If you *do* go, you need not return.”

I appealed to him as to the propriety of such an order, inasmuch as I was only desirous of discharging my duty toward another Patient who might stand in need of assistance. His manner instantly changed, and he said—"I retract that expression," and probably a quarter of an hour afterwards, casting on me an expressive look, he again said "I retract that expression." I told him I thought I understood him distinctly on the subject he had communicated and I presumed the Will would explain itself fully. He replied in his peculiar way "No, you dont understand it; I know you dont:—our laws are extremely particular on the subject of slaves:—a will may manumit them, but provision for their subsequent support requires that a declaration be made in the presence of a white witness, and it is requisite, that the witness, after having the Declaration, should continue with the party and never lose sight of him until he is gone—or dead. You are a good witness for John,—You see the propriety and importance of your remaining with me. Your patients must make allowance for your situation." I saw and felt the force of the appeal. The interest of the scene increased every moment. I was now locked in the chamber with a dying statesman of no common order:—one whose commanding talents, elevated political station, combined with great eccentricity of character, had spread his fame, not only through his native land, but over Europe. He then said, "John told me this morning 'Master, you are dying.'" I made no attempt to conceal my views:—on the contrary, I assured him I would speak to him with entire candor on the occasion, and told him, it had been rather a subject of surprise, that he had continued so long. He now made his preparations to die:—between him and his faithful servant, there appeared to be a complete understanding. He directed John to bring him his father's Breast Button, which was immediately produced—He then directed him, to place it in the bosom of his shirt, (It was an old fashioned, large sized gold

stud.) John placed it in the button hole of the shirt bosom, but to fix it completely, required a hole on the opposite side. When this was announced to his Master, he quickly said—"Get a knife and cut one." I handed my pen knife to John who cut the hole and fixed the valued relic, to the satisfaction of the expiring patient. A napkin was also called for, and was placed by John over the breast of the patient. For a short time, he remained perfectly quiet: his eyes were closed and I concluded he was disposed to sleep. He suddenly roused from this state with the words—"Remorse"—"Remorse." It was twice repeated:—the last time at the top of his voice. Evidently with great agitation, he cried out, "let me see the word!" No reply followed, having learned enough of the character of my Patient, to ascertain that when I did not know *exactly* what to say, it was best to say nothing. He then exclaimed—"Get a Dictionary—Let me see the word? I cast my eyes around, and told him I believed there was none in the room. "Write it down then—Let me see the word." I picked up one of his cards from the table "Randolph of Roanoke"—and enquired whether I should write it on that. "Yes! nothing more proper." Then with my pencil, I wrote "Remorse." He took the card in his hand in a hurried manner and fastened his eyes upon it with great intensity. "Write it on the back"—he exclaimed. I did so and handed it to him again. He was excessively agitated at this period—He repeated "Remorse! You have no idea what it is—You can form no idea of it whatever:—it has contributed to bring me to my present situation, but I have looked to the Lord—Jesus Christ and hope I have obtained pardon." He then said, "Now let John take your pencil and draw a line under the word"—which was accordingly done. I enquired, what was to be done with the card?—He replied, "Put it in your pocket—take care of it—when I am dead—look at it."

This was an impressive scene. All the plans of ambition, the honors and the wealth of this world, had vanished

as bubbles on the water. He knew and felt that his very moments were few, and even they, were numbered. It afforded his Physician an opportunity, without being intrusive, of offering to him a few serious observations, and pointing the expiring statesman to a hope beyond the grave. My situation at this period was serious and embarrassing. Locked in the chamber of a Patient and solemnly called upon as a witness, confirming a Will already made, for the liberation and support of his slaves, when the only human ear that heard these Declarations, except myself and the Testator, was one of the very slaves included in the bequest.—It required no unusual foresight, to anticipate the construction that might be put upon such testimony, perhaps in a distant court, where the witness might be personally unknown:—especially, when added to this, it was found he was a member of the Religious Society of Friends, who long since had washed their hands from the stain of slavery, and whose sentiments on the subject were universally known. I saw that even under a charitable construction of the Testimony, the force of early impressions, and the bias of education might be supposed imperceptibly to influence even an upright mind; and give a coloring to words and facts which to others differently educated, might be viewed in another light. Under these views I introduced the subject of calling in some additional witnesses, and suggested sending down stairs for Edmund Badger, whose attentions were very great to him. He replied, “I have already communicated that, to him.” I stated, it was my intention to be with him as steadily as possible ‘until his death’—but, with his concurrence, I would send for two young Physicians, who should remain and never lose sight of him, until he was dead, and to whom he could make the Declaration.

My son, Dr. Isaac Parrish and my young friend and late pupil, Dr. Francis West, were proposed to him, saying the latter was the brother of Captain West. He quickly asked—“Captain West of the packet?” On receiving an

affirmative reply, he said "Send for him; he is the man." "I'll have him." From some circumstances that had come to my knowledge, I had reason to believe that, Capt'n. James West was a favorite with the Patient.

Before the door was unlocked, he pointed toward a Bureau, and requested I would take from it a remuneration for my services. To this I promptly objected, informing him, I should feel as though I were acting indelicately to comply. He then waived the subject by saying—"In England, it is always customary." The witnesses were sent for and soon arrived. The dying man was propped up in bed, with pillows nearly erect. Those only who knew his form and singular physiognomy can form an idea of his appearance at this moment. Being extremely sensitive to cold, he had a blanket over his head and shoulders and he directed John to place his hat on over the blanket, which aided in keeping it close to his head. This hat bore evident marks of age, and was probably the one exposed to the peltings of the storm, during his discomforts, on the day of his arrival. With a countenance full of sorrow, John stood close to the bed side of his dying Master:—the four witnesses,—viz.—Edmund Badger, Dr. Francis West, my son, Dr. Isaac Parrish, and myself, were placed in a semicircle in full view. It was evidently an awfully interesting moment to the Patient. He rallied all the expiring energies of his mind and body to this last effort—his whole soul seemed concentrated in the act—his eyes flashed feeling and intelligence. Pointing toward us with his long index finger, he thus addressed us; "I confirm all the directions in my Will, respecting my slaves, and direct them to be enforced—particularly in regard to a provision for their support" and then raising his arm as high as he could, he brought it down, with his open hand, on the shoulder of his favorite John—adding words—"Especially for this man." He then asked, each of us, whether we understood him.

At the close of this exhausting effort, I remarked to my fellow witnesses,—that my Patient, a short time before, informed me in private, that according to the laws of Virginia, a will might manumit slaves, yet in order for their subsequent support, it was necessary that a declaration should be made, in the presence of one or more white witnesses; who, after receiving it from the party, should remain and never lose sight of him, until he was dead—I then appealed to the dying man, to know whether I had stated it correctly. He replied—"Yes"—and gracefully waving his hand, as a token of our dismissal—he said—"The young gentlemen will remain with me." I took leave, with an assurance that I would return as speedily as possible and remain with him.

After an absence of perhaps an hour or more—and about 50 minutes before his decease, I returned to his sick room:—but now the scene was changed—his keen penetrating eye had lost its expression, his powerful mind had given way, and he appeared totally incapable of giving any correct directions relative to his worldly concerns. To record what now took place,—may not be required, further than to say, that almost to the last moment some of his eccentricities could be seen lingering about him. He had entered within the dark valley of the Shadow of Death, and what was now passing in his chamber was like the distant voice of words which fall with confusion on the ear. The farther this Master Spirit receded from human view, the sounds became less distinct, until they were finally lost in the deep recesses of the Valley, and all that was mortal of Randolph of Roanoke, was hushed in Death.

In conclusion, perhaps it may be proper for me clearly and distinctly to state, that at the time he made the declarations in my presence, relating to his will, he was capable of discriminating correctly between thing and thing—and he also possessed tenacity of memory; hence he was of sound disposing mind and memory. Early in the afternoon of the

day on which John Randolph died, it was concluded, by the four witnesses, to commit to writing the declarations which he had made, according to their understanding of them. This I did, in a room contiguous to the one wherein he died, and where his corpse was then lying, and the original paper is now in my possession. The paper hereto annexed, marked and subscribed with my name, is a true copy of the same.

(Signed) JOSEPH PARRISH.

WERT BOOKBINDING

JAN 1989

Grantville, PA

